

# Commandant's Note



## From the Challenges Arise Initiatives

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Today — as throughout our Army's history — we face uncertain times. Such uncertainty includes: a revisionist Russia poised to threaten Ukraine; a Communist-led China threatening a democratically led Taiwan; a nuclear-hungry Iran preventing regional stability; and a rogue North Korea threatening some of our most valued allies — South Korea and Japan. During such times, the necessity of the Infantry Soldier always comes into question in light of technological solutions or waging war from other domains. However, history always bears out that regardless of technological innovations, armed conflict requires the Infantry Soldier to close with and destroy the enemy and then hold valuable terrain. Readers can survey many examples in which the Infantry was called on to do so in the article by retired LTCs Bankus and Kievit entitled "U.S. Involvement in Small Wars: A Cold War Focus." Therefore, during such uncertain times, the Infantry Branch must make an even more concerted effort to maintain its health, credibility, and future survivability. To accomplish this effort, we must first take measures to maximize the contributions of all our members regardless of gender or ethnicity. Three critical areas for consideration include acknowledging the value of diversity within our formations, recruiting diversity into our ranks, and developing each and every Soldier regardless of their demographic. Secondly, we must acknowledge the Infantry dismounted rifle squad is the fundamental building block of any Infantry formation.

All Infantry Soldiers — men and women alike — come to us with diverse life experiences and various levels of potential. It is their leaders' job to maximize the contributions to the organization that come from that diversity and develop those various levels of potential to ensure the greatest return for the Infantry. An inclusive leadership approach is critical to these efforts. Inclusive leadership is a willingness to grasp and consider multiple opinions and solutions from various unit members regardless of background or demographics. Inclusion allows divergent opinions and solutions to emerge, yielding more options for unit leadership than the singular solution sets resulting from a group of people with the same backgrounds and experiences. Infantry leaders can practice inclusive leadership by understanding the unique concerns that impact particular Soldiers within their formations. All Infantry leaders should read ILT Hogestyn's article in this edition, titled "Addressing the Pregnant Leader," to understand better how to coach and mentor our female Infantry Soldiers regarding the balance of motherhood and service as an Infantry leader.

Along with these diverse backgrounds, each recruit and young Soldier has a varying level of commitment to the Army and the nation. It is inherent we protect the aspirations of those who have selflessly chosen to serve in the branch that incurs the most danger. We should provide them with the protection we expect anyone to provide our children or close family members. First, we provide such protection by establishing clear standards that enhance

professional discipline and combat readiness. Second, we must communicate and apply those standards consistently.

We must provide an inclusive environment that communicates to everyone that they belong. The productivity of any work environment or profession increases when all members can envision a future in which they may play a more prominent role in the organization. However, some pundits, and more importantly, our Nation's enemies, point to diversity and inclusion efforts as our Army becoming weaker or less cohesive. We must inform and show them, that like our Nation, diversity and inclusion make us stronger, more resilient, and ultimately a more lethal force.

Ensuring diversity through our recruiting efforts provides two critical benefits to the Infantry Branch. One benefit includes ensuring the Infantry does not miss out on top talent due to inaccurate perceptions or historical events. Inaccurate perceptions may come from self-doubt regarding their ability to succeed in the Infantry and perceptions the Infantry does not want them based on its current demographics. The recruitment of our Infantry Soldiers falls under other organizations of the Army, and most of us can only play a supporting role in this effort. However, as discussed in the preceding section, we all can play a more defined role by establishing an inclusive environment.

Additionally, more maneuver room exists in recruiting talented and diverse officers into the Infantry. The majority of cadets spend almost four years learning about the Army and deliberating on their preferences for branch assignment. Over the past year, the U.S. Infantry School and the Office of the Chief of Infantry made concerted efforts to engage commissioning sources and individual ROTC programs. These engagements helped educate cadets on Infantry requirements and the Infantry career model. These efforts resulted in a significant gain in female officer accessions for the Infantry during the 2022 academic year branching cycle over previous years.

The second crucial aspect of recruiting diversity into the Infantry is that it helps establish the inclusive environment needed to allow diversity to flourish. Recruits must see themselves when they see the unit's leaders. Such reflections help remove the bias of categorizing between them and us or automatic perceptions of unit leadership as preferential to one demographic. Also, when there is someone in leadership that the Soldier feels comfortable confiding to, the leadership team can identify systemic or emerging issues before they become debilitating to the organization. Additionally, leadership teams that reflect a cross-segment of the American population increase the chances that new Soldiers and officers will envision themselves rising in the Infantry Branch. The Infantry Branch will continue its current efforts. It will also work with the commissioning sources to develop new approaches for ensuring opportunities to acquire the best talent available.

The dismounted infantry squad provides the fundamental building block of any infantry formation. In this edition, LTC (Retired) Mark Farrar delivers a very descriptive article that compares a brigade combat team with an orchestra with the Infantry squad represented by orchestral strings. To quote LTC Farrar on the importance of the Infantry squad, "no strings — no orchestra." Hence, it follows that our Infantry squad leaders serve at the tip of the spear for mission accomplishment and provide the most influence during a Soldier's most impressionable years. Too often, we have tried to replace the value of the Infantry squad leader with technology and firepower. Often, our Infantry staff sergeants fail to receive enough time in this key developmental assignment. Alternatively, some argue that other assignments are adequate substitutions for squad leader time, such as a vehicle commander. While positions such as vehicle commander are essential to the force, such positions are not common to all infantry formations. Hence, counting time spent in these positions the same as dismounted infantry squad leader time can reduce an NCO's ability to serve across all formations. Ultimately, a lack of dismounted squad leader time can lead to a lack of career diversity as NCOs try to stay with what they know.

As we continue to move away from the paradigm of COIN-centric war to one of large-scale combat against peer threats, the value of time spent as a dismounted squad leader becomes ever more valuable. Our adversaries are building their armies in terms of technology and numbers. The Infantry squad leader will serve as the tip of the spear in future fights against a foe with superior numbers and much more advanced equipment than our adversaries in the past couple of decades. While obvious, it is worth emphasizing the following — the squad leaders of today will be the platoon sergeants of tomorrow and possible company first sergeants in the next war. The time devoted to staff sergeants to serve as dismounted squad leaders contributes to their capability to train platoons and companies in their future leadership roles. Therefore, all of our Infantry staff sergeants must have the opportunity to serve for at least 12 months as dismounted infantry squad leaders.

We must also recognize that the dismounted infantry squad consists of individual Soldiers. Their ability to operate as part of the squad necessitates their mastery of individual tasks. An Infantry Soldier's attainment of the Expert Infantry Badge (EIB) is the most direct indicator for whether a Soldier has mastered these fundamental skills. Barring the issuance of any new regulations, the number of Soldiers in a squad with EIBs is probably the only metric of squad readiness currently available. Not all Soldiers may qualify for the EIB; however, the greatest value of the EIB lies in preparation for the test. There is no other time on a training schedule that the unit focuses solely on the basic Soldier skills for which a squad leader is generally responsible.

Additionally, there is no individual skills training event institutionalized throughout our Infantry formations as well as the EIB. The EIB provides a format for training that grounds the Infantry Soldier in the same tasks, conditions, and standards as his or her peers. At present, USAIS Pamphlet 350-6, *Expert Infantry Badge*, outlines the standards for the intent, training, testing, evaluation, and awarding of the EIB. Such specification certifies that the wearer has met the criteria of mastering the tasks required of an Infantry Soldier. This commonality provides each squad with a standard for individual readiness prior to collective training. Such progression ultimately leads to ready and capable Infantry squads.

The proceeding ideas are not novel or revolutionary; however, they bear repeating as much as possible. As budgetary pressures increase, organizations tend to turn inwards. Because of such organizational behavior, the training and development afforded to the dismounted infantry squad becomes an acceptable area for risk. However, these nine men and women are fundamental to the success of every echelon and type of Infantry formation and, thereby, any future conflict characterized by large-scale combat operations against a peer adversary. Like organizational fears, individual worries can cause leaders to turn inwards and surround themselves with those that resemble themselves the most. Only by rising above those fears will we ensure that we have the most talented and lethal Infantry force needed to defeat our Nation's enemies.